

The Next Round of NATO Enlargement

by Jeffrey Simon

Key Points

The next administration will need to devise a policy on NATO enlargement in preparation for the 2002 summit meeting soon after it takes office.

Political, geostrategic, and technical factors will frame policy options on enlargement, though the shifting importance of these factors will likely influence any decision on enlarging the Alliance.

The political argument for maintaining enlargement momentum in order to demonstrate Alliance credibility and the geostrategic argument for a NATO land bridge gradually have become *less* persuasive as a result of the Kosovo conflict.

Four policy options exist, each with a different impact on the objective of enhancing stability and security beyond NATO and building a Europe whole and undivided.

If NATO were to extend no invitation, the credibility of Article 10 open door policy would be called into question. If it were to invite one or more countries for accession negotiations, momentum would be maintained but perhaps not sufficient development demonstrated to the excluded Membership Action Plan countries. And, if it invited all nine aspirants to join, it might temporarily remove unpleasant political pressure but incur substantial political and geostrategic costs in the future.

Barring political or geostrategic upheavals, the United States should support a 2002 Summit announcement that NATO will invite one or more new members at a future summit, perhaps in 2005 or 2006.

Since the revolutions of 1989–90 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO has emerged as the backbone of Europe's security architecture. In response to the demands of outsiders for collaboration, NATO has consistently adhered to a strategy of inclusion to create a Europe whole and undivided. This was a conscious effort at the July 1990 London Summit, where NATO invited the Soviet Union and non-Soviet Warsaw Pact members "to establish regular diplomatic liaison with NATO," and at the November 1991 Rome Summit, where it launched the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to include them. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in January 1992, NATO decided to include former Soviet republics in the NACC, thus attempting to ensure a Europe free and whole. The same strategy prevailed at the Brussels Summit in January 1994, which launched the Partnership for Peace (PFP) comprising members of NACC and those members of the Conference (now Organization) on Security and Cooperation in Europe that were able and willing to contribute. The July 1997 Madrid Summit decision to invite the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to begin accession talks also was portrayed in terms of inclusion; the Alliance reaffirmed that it remained open to new members under Article 10, adding that "[N]o European democratic country... would be excluded from consideration."

The NATO Summit scheduled for 2002 will have enlargement on the agenda, not just because the April 1999 Washington Summit stated that the next summit would review the enlargement process, but also because the nine Membership Action Plan (MAP) foreign ministers launched a political initiative on May 18–19, 2000 in Vilnius, Lithuania, to remind

the member states of NATO "to fulfill the promise of the Washington Summit to build a Europe whole and free... [and] at the next NATO Summit in 2002 to invite our democracies to join NATO." This political initiative is to be followed by another gathering of the nine MAP defense ministers in Sofia in October 2000. In sum, although internal conditions may not yet be ripe for consensus on enlargement, NATO will be faced with increasing political pressures from the nine MAP aspirants, and a new U.S. administration will need to develop a policy on this issue well before 2002.

Framing Enlargement Policy

Political Factors The guiding principle behind all NATO activities with MAP partners is that all enlargement decisions remain political. While this principle will remain a cornerstone of policy, we need to recognize that as NATO moves down the MAP road we are slowly embedding ourselves in an implicit contractual relationship with the nine aspirants that will increasingly limit political choices. In other words, as NATO encourages MAP governments to implement political, economic, and defense reforms, it is increasingly obliged to choose new members based on these criteria to justify their choices. NATO will find it difficult to decline a MAP partner that clearly has succeeded in implementing serious reforms or to invite one that has not fulfilled them. If NATO were to disregard these criteria, it would undermine the credibility and legitimacy of MAP for those partners (probably the majority) who did

implement defense reforms but were not invited, hence destabilizing the process.

Nevertheless, the Alliance has always said that enlargement will not be based solely on technical progress in defense or on success with democratic and market reforms. Enlargement decisions also will be influenced by the domestic politics in member states, intra-Alliance politics, and international developments. Thus, there will have to be consensus within and among current member states that adding a new member will contribute to overall Alliance security, not just to technical realization of the principles that NATO has developed for accession, which might be called "NATO *acqui*." (Just as the European Union has developed volumes of rules and regulations known as *acqui communautaire*, NATO has developed principles for accession.) This is not easy to game out and will clearly be influenced by a range of issues difficult to predict, including economic trends, the European Union enlargement process, and developments in Russia.

Geostrategic Factors Since the end of the Cold War, the influence of geostrategic factors on membership decisions has been changing as the probability of NATO's operating under an Article 5 defense has shifted to the more likely contingency of NATO's participating in an Article 4 operation, which carries different obligations for Alliance members.

Geostrategic factors were dominant during the Cold War, when execution of main defense actions and support to reception and onward movement of heavy defense forces were at the forefront of membership criteria. The 1995 principles on enlargement made clear that membership should be based on a number of considerations, not just ability to contribute to Alliance security.

Some have focused on geographic position as a key criterion. Yet, even during the Cold War, when Article 5 operations were more plausible and defense requirements were greater, NATO lived with "islands" (Iceland, Norway, the United Kingdom) that required reinforcement. Today, many potential candidates are discussed in geostrategic terms with Article 5 obligations in mind, for example, Slovakia and Slovenia, which provide a land bridge to the NATO island of Hungary, and Romania and Bulgaria, which "contain" Serbia and "stabilize" Macedonia while linking Hungary to Greece (and Turkey).

Including the states of Southeastern Europe in NATO would have geostrategic value in the context of any future Balkan crisis and with respect to advancing and protecting Alliance interests in Caspian Basin energy developments and even in the Middle East (though the importance of such geostrategic factors in the post-Cold War world may be overstated).

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Although Article 4 actions are now more likely, geostrategic factors remain important, but in a different way. For example, in the first Article 4 post-Cold War campaign, NATO extended a limited (in space and time) Article 5 guarantee to non-NATO members (Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and Macedonia) threatened by Belgrade in return for their wartime support in Kosovo. (In paragraphs 13 and 14 of the "Statement on Kosovo" issued by the North Atlantic Council in Washington in 1999, the council stated: "13. We will not tolerate threats by the Belgrade regime to the security of its neighbors. We will respond to such challenges by Belgrade to its neighbors resulting from the presence of NATO forces or their activities on their territory during this crisis. 14. We reaffirm our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in the region.") Hence, formal accession was not necessary for the Alliance to gain compliance of and access to a MAP or PFP partner. Correspondingly, formal membership does not necessarily guarantee the compliance of a new member nor NATO access to its territory during a non-Article 5 contingency. In fact, it might actually *diminish* NATO leverage. (For example, during the Kosovo conflict, NATO found it difficult to

contain the independent diplomatic efforts of the Greek and Czech foreign ministers.)

In sum, while geostrategic factors probably will remain important in the post-Cold War world, they play a different role in more likely non-Article 5 contingencies that will challenge NATO, and extending formal membership to MAP partners in southeast or northeast Europe may not provide the solution that many adherents claim.

Technical Factors When NATO adopted PFP at the Brussels Summit in January 1994, many aspiring NATO members were disappointed and criticized PFP as a "policy for postponement." Few had any notion of how important the program would become. In response to persistent partner pressures to join, in September 1995 NATO produced a *Study on NATO Enlargement* that stressed that the goal of enlargement was to "render obsolete the idea of 'dividing lines' in Europe" and outlined Alliance expectations of new members. The study noted that "PFP would assist partners to undertake necessary defense management reforms [such as] transparent national defense planning, resource allocation and budgeting, appropriate legislation, and parliamentary and public accountability. The PFP Planning and Review Process (PARP) and PFP exercises will introduce partners to collective defense planning and pave the way for more detailed operational planning."

The December 1995 North Atlantic Council (NAC) ministerial launched enhanced dialogues with those partners interested in joining the Alliance. By early 1997, twelve partners had expressed such an interest. When the Madrid Summit extended invitations to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in July 1997, NATO reiterated its open-door policy, created a new Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) to strengthen the role of partners in PFP decisionmaking and planning, and adopted new terms of reference under *enhanced* PFP to broaden cooperation beyond peace enforcement operations. The Political-Military Steering Committee (PMSC) continued to manage PFP programs, the PARP became more significant, and NATO expanded the number of Standardization Agreements (STANAGs) made available

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to partners (now 1,169) through the Partnership Coordination Cell.

At the June 1998 NATO Defense Ministerial, allies and PARP partners agreed to a report entitled "Expanding and Adapting the PFP Planning and Review Process" that suggested major enhancements to the PARP to make it more closely resemble the NATO Defense Planning Questionnaire (DPQ). Beginning in 1999, NATO approved PARP Ministerial Guidance (now like the DPQ) that replaced the old interoperability objectives with Partnership Goals for Interoperability and for Forces and Capabilities. The new guidance aimed to develop specific armed forces and capabilities that partners could offer in support of NATO operations. In addition, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council provided a forum for greater partner participation in deliberations on operations to which partners contribute forces.

The Washington Summit in April 1999 introduced the MAP, in part to convince the remaining nine aspirants that Article 10 (the Open Door policy) was not hollow, and in part to assist them to develop forces and capabilities that could operate with NATO under its new Operational Capabilities Concept. The MAP went further than the 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement* in defining what the aspirants needed to accomplish on the path to membership. It was designed to incorporate lessons learned in the accession discussions with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland.

The MAP includes submission of a tailored Annual National Plan that covers political, economic, defense, resource, security, and legal aspects of membership; a feedback mechanism through a NAC 19+1 partner progress assessment; a clearinghouse for coordinating security assistance; and enhanced defense planning that reviews agreed planning targets. The MAP process contains the same potential to mature into a fundamental program not originally envisioned by its architects as the PFP. In fact, one might argue that the comprehensive MAP program has created the necessary NATO *acquis* against which the Alliance can assess the technical preparations and capacities of the nine MAP partners and judge their readiness for membership. At the same time, the process is reinforcing and deepening the partners' expectations of NATO reciprocation.

Four Options

From the perspective of the shifting weight among political, geostrategic, and technical factors, each of the following four 2002 Summit enlargement policy options can be assessed. Each option solves one set of problems and produces different challenges.

Option 1 *Assert the NATO Article 10 commitment to remain open, but invite no new member.*

If the Alliance simply reiterates its commitment to remain open and invites no new member, the key challenge will be to maintain

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NATO credibility among the nine MAP partners and to keep them engaged in the MAP process to maintain its stabilizing role. While this option has the advantages of not undermining Alliance efforts to further develop cooperative relations with Russia and Ukraine and of not requiring justification of selective invitations, MAP partners will expect more than this. Some are likely to perceive this as an Alliance brush-off, make claims that NATO is pursuing a "Yalta-2" policy, and argue that a divided Europe is emerging. In sum, the Alliance will probably find this option difficult to implement and justify, particularly in the face of MAP partner pressures and in light of the objective of maintaining a Europe free and whole.

Option 2 *Invite one or more aspirants to begin accession negotiations.*

Inviting one or more aspirants to begin accession negotiations maintains political momentum and reinforces NATO credibility on Article 10, but it raises the challenge of dealing with the uninvited MAP partners. NATO would need to persuade the excluded MAP partners that the invited nations had actually achieved reforms that justified inclusion. If the case were not credible, it would be difficult to gain

U.S. Senate support for the invited partner(s), and some MAP partners would conclude that they would never get an invitation and might disengage from further cooperation. While the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly supported the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, it went on record that it expected guarantees that additional new members would be producers and not consumers of security. The experiences thus far with new members will only make this concern more salient in the next enlargement round.

In the fall of 1998, the North Atlantic Assembly (Roth) report suggested that NATO invite Slovenia at the April 1999 Washington Summit to demonstrate the credibility of Article 10. The Alliance did not adopt this proposal, in part because consensus did not yet exist, and in part because Slovenia had simply not made sufficient effort in the development of its defense capabilities and structures compared to other aspirants. The political argument for maintaining enlargement momentum in order to demonstrate Alliance credibility and the geostrategic argument for a NATO land bridge gradually have become *less* persuasive as a result of the Kosovo conflict experience and the changes in MAP since its launch. The net effect is the slow shift of balance toward *increasing* the weight of technical performance at the expense of political and geostrategic factors.

Inviting a new member for accession talks in 2002 presents more of a challenge to NATO now, because the Alliance has acquired additional (and less than exemplary) performance experience with the three new members and has fine-tuned the MAP process. (Since accession on March 12, 1999, all three new NATO members have implemented so-called strategic reviews and lowered their force goal commitments over the next six years; the Czech Republic will reduce its forces probably to 40,000, Hungary to 37,500, and Poland to 150,000. One could argue that these reviews are the result of defense planning failures in all three countries.) Whereas previous summits (Brussels in 1994, Madrid in 1997, and Washington in 1999) were able to develop new programs (such as PFP, then enhanced PFP and EAPC, and later the MAP, respectively) to maintain credibility, NATO's future programmatic options are becoming more limited. We have installed the MAP and need to use the process and its technical criteria to justify an

invitation. Unfortunately, the nine MAP partners have very limited technical capacities at the present time, and making a credible case for any of them on NATO *acqui* grounds is not yet possible.

Option 3 *Extend an invitation to all nine aspirants, with the caveat that actual accession will occur only after the specific five MAP chapters of NATO *acqui* have been completed.*

This so-called Big Bang proposal to invite all nine MAP members gained political momentum with the Vilnius Statement in May 2000 and likely will be followed by additional political efforts. The argument of the nine MAP members is that a NATO accession invitation would permit them to stop politicking to join (and thereby remove a political burden from NATO) and would provide their governments political ammunition to build domestic social support to carry through defense reforms and justify continued participation in the MAP.

The argument that such an invitation would remove political pressure from NATO is questionable. Many of the same MAP partners who have been designated future EU members are continuing to express impatience and vent frustration, arguing that the EU is stalling or delaying the date of accession. In addition, an invitation to the nine would not necessarily help them build social support for defense programs or for NATO. On the contrary, the three new NATO members have been unable to generate additional social support for defense budgets or for NATO. (For example, after becoming a member, Hungary revised downward its pre-accession commitments to raise defense expenditures 0.1 percent per year.)

Offsetting the benefits that the nine believe would accrue from an invitation are potentially substantial political and geostrategic costs. First, this option would mark a distinct shift in NATO post-Cold War policy in that the (unintended) result would be a *perception* that NATO had drawn lines, that now Europe was once again divided. It would signal to countries like Croatia and Moldova (and perhaps Austria, Sweden, and Finland) that they were outside the NATO membership circle, stretching the credibility of Article 10. Second, Ukraine, a fragile, non-MAP, PFP partner of 52 million is delicately balancing internal forces pushing toward the West and pulling toward Moscow and would find its strategic position challenged. Inviting all nine could tilt that balance, driving Ukraine outside the line.

Third, such a policy would make it very difficult (if not impossible) for Russia to maintain a cooperative relationship with NATO. This policy would push Russia to become more competitive and to draw a line, with possible reverberations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. In sum, an invitation to nine MAP partners at the next Summit would probably remove temporarily some unpleasant political pressure from the Alliance but incur substantial political and geostrategic costs.

Option 4 *Announce that the Alliance will invite one or more new members at some future Summit, perhaps in 2005 or 2006.*

Announcing the intention to invite one or more new members at a Summit in 2005 or 2006 is a variation of the December 1996 formulation that committed the Alliance to

enlargement of NATO will result not in the inclusion of weak consumers for the sake of political momentum, but in a stronger NATO with producers of security

“invite one or more” at the July 1997 Madrid Summit. Politically, this differs from Option 1 in that it would demonstrate and reinforce NATO credibility on enlargement while remaining consistent with the strategy of building an undivided Europe. Technically, the option provides the (hopefully sufficient) 3–4 years necessary to permit germination and maturation of some MAP partners’ technical capacities in fulfilling NATO *acqui*. Geographically, it would provide necessary time to see how Russia evolves under Vladimir Putin, as well as to observe the reform efforts in

Ukraine. Whether cooperative or competitive relations evolve in Russia or Ukraine will be the result of their internal evolution, not the result of NATO pressure.

Success will be defined if the MAP process succeeds in “growing” one or more MAP partners who could be invited to accede to the Alliance on NATO *acqui* grounds, partners whose reforms will be credible enough to the excluded partners to persuade them to remain engaged in the MAP program. Hence, enlargement of NATO will result not in the inclusion of weak consumer partners for the sake of political momentum, but in a stronger NATO with producers of security, and in continued stabilization of MAP and PFP partners. For these reasons, barring radical political and/or geostrategic upheavals, the United States should support a 2002 Summit policy announcing that the Alliance will “invite one or more new members” at a 2005 or 2006 Summit.

Coda

One rightfully could ask regarding enlargement, to what end? Do limits exist? Does the Alliance have boundaries that it should not cross? The answer, of course, is yes, but these limits are not yet perceptible, because the geographic space of the common Euro-Atlantic values that define that area cannot yet be drawn with clarity. While many PFP and MAP partners espouse those values, their rhetoric masks the difficulty of transforming stated intentions into reality. With the MAP, NATO has sketched the path and provided the tools. It remains to be seen who among the PFP and MAP partners has the will and capability to travel that path.

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